

Resolution 2414 (2022)¹

The right to be heard – Child participation: a foundation for democratic societies

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Every child has the right to speak and to be heard. Their experiences, thoughts and feelings must be taken into account when decisions are made about their lives. Children are knowledgeable, resourceful, enthusiastic, daring and creative. Listening to children can help us make our societies a better place for everyone.
2. While climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent social crisis are putting children's futures at risk, decisions on these issues continue to be made with little or no regard for children's concerns. It is time for governments and parliaments to consider children's views whenever decisions affecting their lives are made and put into practice.
3. Traditionally, policy makers focus on topics related to childcare and child protection – be it the right to family life, to health or to education. Child protection is certainly of huge importance, but so is the development of children's capacities to think and act with confidence. Indeed, when done with due care for the age and maturity of the child, such empowerment may enhance levels of protection. In many contexts, children themselves can inform policy makers about their needs, with the help of well-tried child-friendly approaches and methodologies.
4. Truly democratic societies cannot be built unless we listen to children (those under the age of 18). Child participation in political decision making strengthens their understanding of democracy and their skills in dialogue, their understanding of their rights and their capability to resolve conflicts without violence. It enables them to respect themselves and others and increases confidence and self-esteem. It is also an essential building block of democratic security and the stability of our societies.
5. In the past decade, child participation has gained unprecedented levels of attention and has become a must for many organisations. Nevertheless, while there exists a wealth of examples of successful practice, too often child participation is not given sufficient priority and resources, and remains tokenistic, sporadic or limited to the privileged and articulate minority.
6. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that child participation is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and is therefore an international legal obligation. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges children's right to participation as an essential part of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Child participation is also included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly and other bodies have adopted texts on child participation, which provide a comprehensive framework and useful guidance, remain valid and need to be better known and used.

1. *Assembly debate* on 24 January 2022 (2nd sitting) (see [Doc. 15435](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Baroness Doreen E. Massey). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 24 January 2022 (2nd sitting).

See also [Recommendation 2218 \(2022\)](#).



7. The Assembly thus calls on the Council of Europe member States and on national parliaments to support effective and sustainable child participation, and to this effect to:

- 7.1. review the progress achieved, in accordance with the above-mentioned standards and guidance, identify gaps and take measures to support effective child participation;
- 7.2. ensure that child participation is systematic and inclusive, with a particular focus on children in vulnerable situations; that it is well prepared and evaluated; that children's views are duly reflected when decisions are made; and that children are provided with feedback on how their views were taken into account;
- 7.3. support systematic capacity building for promoting child participation among all professionals dealing with children, as well as among parliamentarians and public-service officials, through initial and in-service training, and education and public awareness campaigns;
- 7.4. support the development of and ensure due respect for relevant safeguarding provisions, with special attention paid to the needs of children in vulnerable situations;
- 7.5. support local and regional authorities and civil society organisations in promoting child participation;
- 7.6. consider lowering the voting age to 16;
- 7.7. make full use of Council of Europe tools, such as the Handbook on children's participation "Listen – Act – Change", the Child Participation Assessment Tool, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture and the "Compasito" manual on human rights education for children;
- 7.8. support international co-operation in the area of child participation, including with other regional and international organisations.

8. The Assembly undertakes to put child participation into practice in its own work as follows:

- 8.1. consult children, who, with their range of different backgrounds, are representative of our societies, in the preparation of the Assembly reports that concern them, in an appropriate way and with due respect for child safeguarding procedures, for example through written consultations, participation in hearings, focus groups and parliamentary networks; give children a voice in the debates on Assembly reports that concern them, for example by inviting a child representative to take the floor during debates on reports in plenary or in the Standing Committee; and provide children with feedback on how their contributions were used and what impact they might have had;
- 8.2. monitor Assembly reports for compliance with the rights of the child and child participation;
- 8.3. pay particular attention to the participation of children in vulnerable situations;
- 8.4. support systematic information sharing and synergies with other Council of Europe bodies, international and European institutions, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Parliament and with the voluntary sector;
- 8.5. consider facilitating annual reviews of child participation in parliaments, with the support of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) and with Eurochild.

9. The Assembly welcomes the adoption of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child in 2021 and the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child in 2022, as well as the European Commission's European Child Guarantee, and expresses its support for the plans to set up the EU Children's Participation Platform and a space for children to become active participants in the European Climate Pact through pledges or by becoming Pact Ambassadors.